

“BARCELONA, DOLL YOURSELF UP”

IN 1985 THE BARCELONA CITY COUNCIL BEGAN ITS CAMPAIGN FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE, POPULARIZED WITH THE SLOGAN “BARCELONA, POSA'T GUAPA” (BARCELONA, DOLL YOURSELF UP). THE AIM OF THE CAMPAIGN IS TO SUBJECT THE CITY TO AN EXTENSIVE CLEANING OPERATION AND TO DISCOVER WHAT SECRETS LIE HIDDEN UNDER THE DUST AND CONTAMINATION.



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After a few small-scale operations, the “*Campanya per a la Millora del Paisatge Urbà*”, popularized by the slogan *Barcelona, posat guapa* and under the direction of the department of Town Planning and Municipal Services, received the unanimous approval of the Barcelona City Council in 1985. At the root of this initiative was the fact that the city was in need of an extensive clean-up operation, to discover what secrets lay hidden under the dust and contamination, and to arrive at what Vázquez Montalbán has called a “socialization of beauty”. There are two parts to the campaign: the one that affects houses, offices and commercial premises, paid for by the owners with the help of local authority subventions, and the one that affects large monuments and architectural complexes, undertaken with sponsorship from private businesses. This campaign, which started by promoting the restoration of facades and has gradually grown to cover other work, has always provided a “single interlocutor” service, with a single tele-

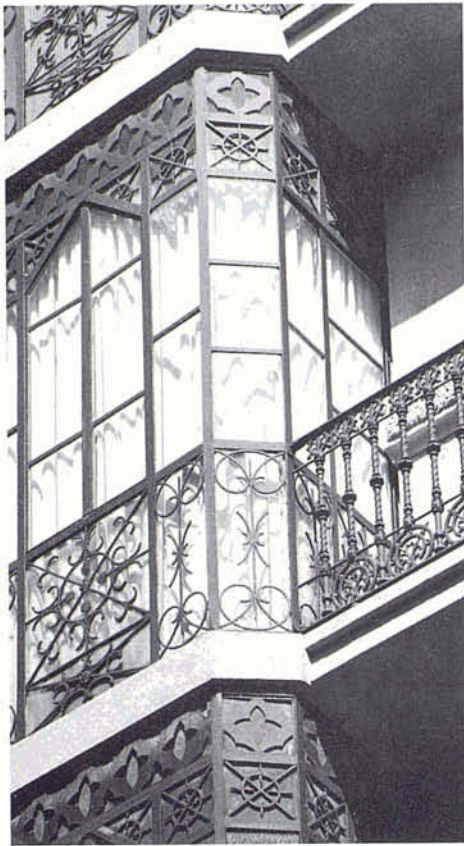
phone number where the public receive information and advice on all the formalities to be gone through. This avoids weary treks around the different administrative offices. The Town Hall itself draws up a technical report which is free of charge and not binding –this is needed by anyone wanting to join the campaign– and inspects the work undertaken.

The figures speak for themselves: between 1987 and 1988 there have been more than 22,000 telephone enquiries, 24,000 visitors at the campaign offices, and a total of over 2,000 letters received. Most of these enquiries have come from owners' associations. A total of 2,325 initiatives have been undertaken, involving direct subventions to the value of 381,000,000 pesetas, while tax exemptions have amounted to another 118,000,000 pesetas. By districts, the *Eixample*, traditionally the home of the well-to-do bourgeoisie, with many old buildings of great value, has concentrated 36 % of the planning permissions issued.

The main job of the “*Campanya per a*

la Millora del Paisatge Urbà” has been the restoration and cleaning of facades. As in the rest of the work, consideration has been given both to the preservation of historic and artistic buildings in the city centre and to the improvement of outlying districts, though the highest number of operations have taken place in the *Eixample* district –374 out of a total of 1,121–, where there has been a gradual snowball effect. The restoration of facades, which includes paintwork, ceramics and graffiti-work, has been complemented by a specific programme for the retrieval and restoration of blinds and iron-work on the balconies. The campaign has of necessity to include a special section to deal with the characteristic problem in Barcelona of exposed end walls, made worse by their abusive exploitation as advertising space.

The Barcelona landscape is often ruined by shop-signs and awnings which, with remarkably bad taste, announce the names of commercial establishments and the goods they sell. For years, and especially from the forties on, there was



a predominant belief that the bigger and brighter the sign, and the more it clashed with its surroundings, the more successful it would be. During 1987 and 1988, 300 establishments were given planning permission for exterior improvements as part of the *Barcelona, posa't guapa* campaign.

One of Barcelona's great attractions is its modernist stained glass. The City Council provides grants to cover a minimum of 20 % of the cost of restoring this valuable cultural heritage. Since 1983, over 1,000 square metres of stained glass have been restored, both in palaces and churches as well as in more modest buildings.

Areas for private use, such as interior gardens, and other suitable sites (small courtyards, dividing walls, terraces and balconies) also receive a grant from the campaign, ranging between 20 and 40 %. Any spot is good for planting flowers and making the city more attractive.

Barcelona posa't guapa also covers the toilets and kitchens in Barcelona's bars and restaurants, a less immediately visi-

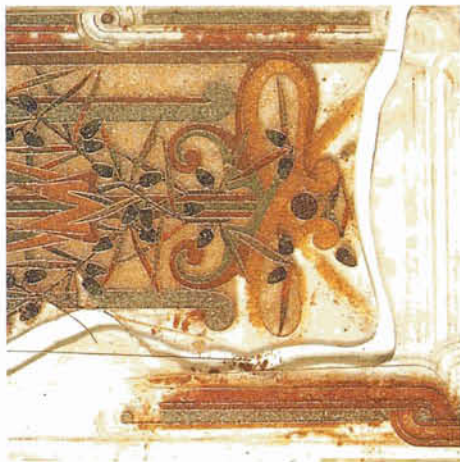
ble part of the city landscape, but one whose importance is unquestionable from the point of view of the standard of living, so as to improve sanitary conditions and adapt them to the needs of the public. In the first two years of the campaign, planning permission has been issued for 230 of these cases.

More than 40 % of the Barcelona municipal district suffers noise levels over 70 db on weekdays, and even at night the problem affects 20 % of the area. Sound-proofing, one of the objectives of a campaign which sets out to adapt the city to the demands of industrial development, is included as a specific programme within the campaign. This programme is directed on the one hand towards sound-proofing houses and offices—with an average cost of 160,000 pesetas—, and on the other hand to the insulation of noise-producing activities—with an average cost of 450,000 pesetas. Although it is not so familiar to the general public, it has received widespread support.

The municipal budget cannot cover the cost of restoring the city's many public

monuments and architectural complexes. The "Campanya per a la Millora del Paisatge Urbà" has turned to private patronage, which has made it possible to repair a series of buildings and monuments. One significant example is the Casa Milà, a limestone building by the architect Gaudí on the Passeig de Gràcia, included in UNESCO's Heritage of Mankind list and restored thanks to the support of a financial institution. The dirt on the facade was removed with a powerful hose which fired microscopic particles of glass dust under pressure, restoring the original white in place of the grey. The work of stripping, cleaning, rendering and treating with regenerative mortar has been completed with the replacement of the worst-affected stonework. Elements such as blinds, balconies and skylights have also been restored.

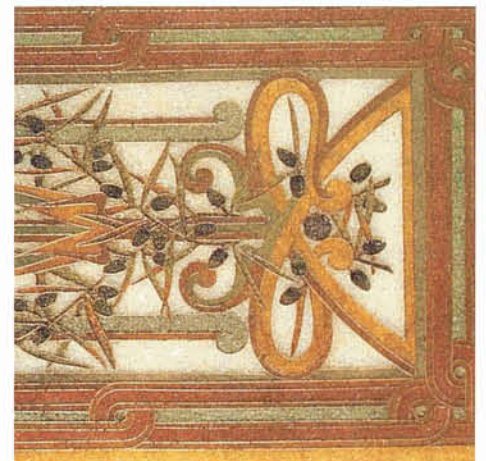
Another emblematic monument, the Arc de Triomf—the gateway to the Universal Exhibition of 1888—is being completely restored with the help of a department store which has contributed 112,000,000 pesetas. A Spanish multi-



few examples of restoration projects supported by a single sponsor.

Half a dozen companies take part in the *Taxi, posa't guapo* programme, with its slogan "Let's have a change of air", which promotes the adaptation of car engines to non-contaminating fuel, the installation of air-conditioning and the repositioning of the taxi-meter where the passenger can see it. At the moment, the "Campanya per a la millora del Paisatge Urbà" is working to make people aware of the importance of colour and texture as basic elements in the urban environment and to establish a standard colour code, also with the support of a group of companies.

The campaign's greatest success, as pointed out by the organizers, is that it has managed to rouse the enthusiasm of the people of Barcelona, who show greater pride in their city now than they did a few years ago. The extent of the work has revitalised some sectors which were in crisis –such as the glass sector– and launched others –companies specialising in the restoration of facades. All in all, the work undertaken so far



national oil company has offered 325,000,000 pesetas for the restoration, improvement and modernization of Barcelona's fountains. A horticultural firm sponsored the *Barcelona en flor* campaign, offering 300,000 flower pots for sale, 240,000 containing five sun-loving plants and 60,000 containing five shade-loving plants, at a top price of 500 pesetas each. These are just a

has been of enormous value in all respects.

As regards the future, *Barcelona, posa't guapa* will go on at least until 1992. After the Olympic Games, it will probably become a straightforward municipal service like any other, operating more or less the same as it does now but without so much emphasis on publicity and information. ■